

Pastor Russell's Sermon

PASTOR RUSSELL LOSES A SUNDAY

Adjustment of the Calendar Responsible.

CHRISTMAS SERMON INSTEAD.

A Novel Experience For the Foreign Missions Investigation Committee on the Pacific Ocean--Noted Preacher Points a Moral--Danger of Unwise Expenditure of Energy--Compensations That Follow Effort Expended in the Service of God and Fellow Men.



Pacific Mid-ocean, Dec. 25th. -- The Foreign Missions Investigation Committee, as well as other passengers, had the novel experience of losing a day from the calendar--a Sunday at that. They retired on Saturday the 23d and awakened in the morning of December 25th. It was determined, however, that this adjustment of the calendar should work no real loss; but that Sunday and Christmas day should be observed as one. Pastor Russell was called upon for a sermon in the interest of his immediate hearers and also for his worldwide congregation of millions reached through the public press. Responding, the Pastor said:--

It is a new experience to many of us--this losing of a day for the rectification of the calendar. And yet I reflect that, after all, many of us have lost many days each year in a very similar manner. As we journeyed westward we have kept setting our watches back rapidly, and thus making our days twenty-five hours long, until now we have reached the reckoning period, and must make good all those advanced hours by striking out one whole day. So some of us have lengthened our days into nights and have figuratively burned the candle at both ends, only to find that in the end there must be compensations, and that we really have gained nothing over those who have taken life moderately.

Some have done this in the pursuit of pleasure, others in pursuit of wealth, others in pursuit of honor. We admit that extraordinary effort in any of these directions is unwise. Only in two ways could an enforced expenditure of life's energies be approved as wise and judicious. One of these would be in the service of our God, the other in the service of fellow-men; and it is not strange that in Divine providence what might be termed "over-exertion" in these two directions is usually non-injurious, and that there are compensations of mental and spiritual rest and refreshment, peace and joy obtainable in no other way, from no other quarter--which the world can neither give nor take away.

Sunday and Christmas "Shadows of Better Things to Come"

Since we are obliged to lose a Sunday, how fortunate we are in having Christmas day instead, and thus to combine in our experiences the two days which mean so much to us in a commemorative way and as "shadows of better things to come." (Hebrews x. 1.) The birth of Jesus as the Babe of Bethlehem already links this day in our minds with His birth from the dead on the first day of the week. And these two events, inseparable in their importance to the Church and the world, combine peculiarly before our minds today.

Christmas day reminds us of the necessity there was for a perfect man to give himself as the Ransom-price--the corresponding price for the first Adam's transgression--before reconciliation with the Father could be possible. Hence, as the Scriptures portray, the great Logos, the "First-born of every creature" (Colossians i. 15), humbled Himself, laid aside His glory and dignity as a spirit being and took the lower, the human nature, in order "that He, by the grace of God, should taste death for every man." (Hebrews ii. 9.) Begotten of the Holy Spirit at the time of His consecration at baptism, it was necessary that He should be born of the Spirit in the resurrection--that He should become "the First-born of them that slept," "the First-born among many brethren," "the First-born from the dead." (I Corinthians xv. 20; Romans viii. 29; Colossians i. 18.)

The Meaning of Christmas.

My text for the occasion is the message of the angels who announced the Savior's birth--"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."--Luke ii. 14.

It is essential that the dignity, the glory, the honor of our Omnipotent Creator should be maintained; and it is advantageous to the interests of all His creatures to know of His greatness, to appreciate His glory and to render to Him the homage His glorious character deserves. It may be asked, Why should the angels lay special stress upon Divine glory and honor at such a time? Had there been any reflection against the Divine glory and honor? We answer, Yes. For more than four thousand years our earth, so large to us, but really so small a portion of the Universe, had been a scene of disorder quite out of accord

with the remainder of that Universe. It had been a blot upon the otherwise wonderful and gracious management of the Great Creator. Elsewhere, God's will was perfectly done. Amongst men there had been for forty centuries a reign of sin and death. Satan exercised usurped influence over mankind, preying upon human weakness, ignorance and superstition. As the Apostle declares, he had become "the god of this world," "who now worketh in the children of disobedience" (II Cor. iv. 4; Eph. ii. 2). In the language of Jesus he was the Prince, or ruler, of this world, in that the great mass of mankind, some willingly, more ignorantly, were his servants.

We can only imagine how matters must have appeared to the holy angels, who for long centuries previously had witnessed no disloyalty to God and no unhappiness amongst His creatures on any plane of being; for them now to see Satan in rebellion and other angels following his course and becoming demons, and to see man, made in God's image, demoralized and his heart of tenderness turned to a heart of stone and selfishness, so that

"Man's inhumanity to man Makes countless thousands mourn"--All this must have been bewildering to the loyal angels, who doubtless wondered whether or not the Universe could thus pass from the control of the Almighty Creator. Undoubtedly they were aware of the Divine intimation of a better day, as expressed in the promise that the Seed of the woman should ultimately bruise the Serpent's head; but ah, things had gone from bad to worse since that glorious promise was made, and Divine Power seemed less able than ever to grapple with the powers of darkness. How they must have wondered at this!

God's Oath-bound Promise.

Undoubtedly the angels had heard of the Divine promise made to Abraham, and buttressed with the Divine oath, that by these two immutable assurances--God's Word and His oath--the blessings promised might be confidently expected. And that promise was twofold: (1) That all the families of the earth should eventually be blessed, and (2) that this blessing should come to them through Abraham's posterity or seed. We can well imagine how this joyful news would spread amongst the heavenly hosts: "A better day is coming; the reign of sin and death in the world is to be stopped! The blessing of the Lord is to reach the fallen race and put an end to ignorance, superstition, blindness, sin, dying, crying, and pain!" "Ah!" they must have said, "Finally God is about to take action and to demonstrate His great Power. We felt sure all along that He possessed this Power; and yet it seems strange to us that He did not exercise it sooner.

But these rejoicing angels must have wondered as they perceived the apparent failure of their expectations. After long years of waiting, Ishmael was born, but seemed a very unsuitable heir--scarcely a fulfillment of the promise. Long years later came Isaac, whose supernatural birth seemed to point to the fulfillment of the promise. But he accomplished nothing wonderful and died, transmitting the glorious promise and hope to Jacob. More long years passed and Jacob did not fulfill the promise, but left it to his family as a whole--a rather unpromising family as respected the blessing of mankind. Then the nation of Israel, so far from blessing other nations, went into bondage to the Egyptians; and all of God's promises seemed to have failed.

The Testing of the Angels Continued.

Ah! what a testing He gave the loyal angels! How their faith in Wisdom and Power Divine must have been tried! Finally, under Moses, the Divinely appointed leader, the nation of Israel suddenly emerged from slavery and, under Divine favor, reached Mt. Sinai and there entered into Covenant-relationship with God, as the seed of Abraham, heirs of the original promise of blessing the world. Now matters began to look toward a fulfillment of the gracious promise that filial of the earth would be blessed--notwithstanding the fact that Abraham was dead.

The trying experiences of the wilderness must have been disappointing, not only to the Israelites, but also to the interested angels beyond the veil, who, St. Peter tells us, earnestly desired to look into these things and sought for the fulfillment of the promise. (I Peter i. 10, 11.) Finally Calne, the land of promise, was reached, but the progress of Israel toward world-domination and blessing was slow. One after another of their enemies brought their prosperity for a time. Then came their tribulation, when they were set up under the King David, who set up the throne of the kingdom of the Lord, and throne of the kingdom of the Lord, the glories then under King Solomon, the glories of whose kingdom typified that of the coming Messiah, of which they knew nothing. Then came further failures, Babylonian captivities--all wasting discouragements.

Meantime the discouraged Israelites found that they themselves were not receiving the blessing that they had hoped for under the Law Covenant--overlasting life. The Law had said that whoever would act in harmony with its commands would have life; but they were all dying. The lesson to them was their own weakness, their inability to keep the Law--the glorious promise, which is the measure of a Law of God, which is the measure of a perfect man's ability--"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, mind, soul and strength, and thy neighbor as thyself." As St. Paul declares, they could keep this Law only with their minds--they could will to keep it, but to perform all their good will in but to perform all their good will in this respect was impossible, because of the weakness of their flesh. The more able and loyal of them, realizing their

own weakness, cried out to God for help; while others, Pharisaically, boasted of their holiness.

A Savior--a Great One.

In the meantime, through the Prophets, God informed Israel that He foreknew their inability to comply with the terms of the Law Covenant; but that He would send them another Mediator, greater than Moses, who would inaugurate for them a still better Covenant, under which their sins and iniquities and weaknesses would be taken away, and their stoutness of heart would gradually give place again to tenderness--to hearts of flesh. (Jeremiah xxxi. 31.) The Mediator, Messenger or Servant of that New Covenant which will be the temporary requirement for Israel and for the world, is referred to as "the Messenger of the Covenant, whom ye delight in." (Malachi iii. 1.) They called Him Messiah and kept waiting for Him to appear in glory and in power, to assume the reins of government over their nation--to uplift them to power and influence and make them His messengers and servants in conveying His laws and regulations to all the families of the earth, for the uplifting and blessing of all.

A Savior, Christ the Lord.

The angels who announced the birth of Jesus well knew His rank and relationship to the Father; that He had left the glory of His heavenly station to become through His mother a member of Adam's race, and that He was, therefore, a suitable one to be the Redeemer or Ransomer of the race. The angels realized that in this Savior lay all the hope of Abraham and his seed and of all the families of the earth. If they had waited long and had been often disappointed they realized that at last they were in the midst of wonderful events. "Unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulders." No wonder they sang, "Glory to God in the highest!" To them our Savior's birth must have meant, "Now God's glorious character, in which we have always had faith, is about to be vindicated; and this great event, the birth of Jesus, marks the beginning of the fulfillment of God's gracious promise which He bound with His oath, and which all along, therefore, we knew could not fall nor be set aside." But they sang more--"Peace on earth, good will toward men." They perceived that sin, rebellion and the Divine sentence--the curse of death--were to be removed in a legal, judicial manner, and that for this purpose the Logos had humbled Himself to human nature.

Their eyes of faith looked down into the future, and though not understanding how it would be accomplished, they had unwavering confidence in God that eventually the "serpent" of sin would be crushed and Adam and his race released from the bondage of sin and death; and they perceived that somehow all this was associated with the birth of the Babe of Bethlehem. We can imagine with what interest they told the "good tidings of great joy for all people" and sang "Glory to God."

"God Moves in a Mysterious Way."

It must have been a cause of still further bewilderment to the angels when they perceived that Israel rejected Jesus and ultimately crucified Him. Then came His resurrection on the third day; and they beheld Him a Spirit Being of the highest order--divine nature. What could it mean? They must still wait and watch, listen and note the gradual unfolding of the Divine Program. After encouraging and instructing His disciples the Logos ascended up on high and appeared in the presence of God. There He was proclaimed "Lord of All" and given a position of dignity next to the Father--at the right hand of the Majesty on high. Gradually the angels came to understand that the Divine Law, which had sentenced man to death, was immutable; and that it was therefore necessary that Jesus should become flesh, not to aid the Jewish nation and become an earthly king, but to redeem Israel and all of Adam's race, and, ascending up on high, thus to be qualified as the great antitypical Priest to make reconciliation for iniquity--"yea, for the rebellious also" (Ps. lxxviii. 18).

Next it was manifested that although Israel did not receive the blessing sought for, yet the elect, the saintly few who were ready received it and, by the begetting of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and after, became sons of God and joint-heirs with Messiah as members of the spiritual Seed. But there were not enough of these "Israelites indeed" to make up the predestinated number, and hence, in harmony with prophecies not previously noted, a drawing and a calling work proceeded amongst the Gentiles to gather from them a sufficient number to complete the Divine foreordination, as the Bride class--Messiah's joint-heirs. For more than eighteen centuries this work of selecting has proceeded; and throughout this period the Holy angels have learned more and more regally have learned more and more respecting Divine Love, Justice, Wisdom and Power. But God's name has not yet been glorified, and "peace on earth" has not been established. The reign of sin and death still continues.

Now, my dear friends, unless I misunderstand God's Word, we are living at the most wonderful period of earth's history. The elect Bride of Christ, foreordained to share with Him the glory of His Messianic Kingdom, is nearly completed; and in a great time of trouble--already near--there will be a transferring of the kingdoms of this world to the rule of Messiah. Satan, the Prince of Darkness, will be bound for a thousand years; Christ, the Prince of Light (His Church, His Bride, in association), as the Seed of Abraham, will reign during that thousand years for the blessing of Adam and his race--"all the families of the earth."

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